THE DUEL — By O. Henry

THE gods, lying beside their nectar on 'Lympus and peeping over the edge of the cliff, perceive a difference in cities. Although it would seem that to their vision towns must appear as large or small ant hills without special characteristics, yet it is not so. Studying the habits of ants from so great a height should be but a mild diversion when coupled with the soft drink that mythology tells us is their only solace. But, doubtless they have amused themselves by the comparison of villages and towns; and it will be no news to them (nor, perhaps, to many mortals), that in one particularity New York stands unique among the cities of the world. This shall be the theme of a little story addressed to the man who sits smoking with his Sabbath slippered feet on another chair, and to the woman who snatches the paper for a moment while boiling greens or a narcotized baby leaves her free. With these I love to sit upon the ground and tell sad stories of the death of kings.

New York city is inhabited by 4,000,000 mysterious strangers; thus beating Bird Center by three millions and a half a dozen 9's. They came here in various ways and for many reasons—Hendrik Hudson, the art schools, green goods, the stork, the annual dressmakers' convention, the Pennsylvania raiload, love of money, the stage, cheap excursion rates, brains, personal column ads, heavy walking shoes, ambition, freight trains—all these have had a hand in making up the population.

But every man jack when he first sets foot on the stones of Manhattan has got to fight. He has got to fight at once until either he or his adversary wins. There is no resting between rounds, for there are no rounds. It is slugging from the first. It is a fight to a finish.

Your opponent is the city. You must do battle with it from the time the ferryboat lands you on the island until either it is yours or it has conquered you. It is the same whether you have a million in your pocket or only the price of a week's lodging.

The battle is to decide whether you shall become a New Yorker or turn the rankest outlander and Philistine. You must be one or the other. You cannot remain neutral. You must be for or against—love or enemy—bosom friend or outcast. And, oh, the city is a general in the ring. Not only by blows does it seek to subdue you. It woos you to its heart with the subtlety of a siren. It is a combination of Delilah, green Chartreuse, Beethoven, chloral and John L. in his best days.

In other cities you may wander and abide as a stranger man as long as you please. You may live in Chicago until your hair whitens, and be a citizen and still prate of beans if Boston mothered you, and without rebuke. You may become a civic pillar in any other town but Knickerbocker's, and all the time publicly sneer at its buildings, comparing them with the architecture of Colonel Talfair's residence in Jackson, Miss., from whence you hail, and you will not be set upon. But in New York you must be either a New Yorker or an invader of a modern Troy, concealed in the wooden horse of your conceited provincialism. And this dreary preamble is only to introduce to you the unimportant figures of William and Jack.

They came out of the West together, where they had been friends. They came to dig their fortunes out of the big city

Father Knickerbocker met them at the ferry, giving one a right-hander on the nose and the other an uppercut, with his left, just to let them know that the fight was on.

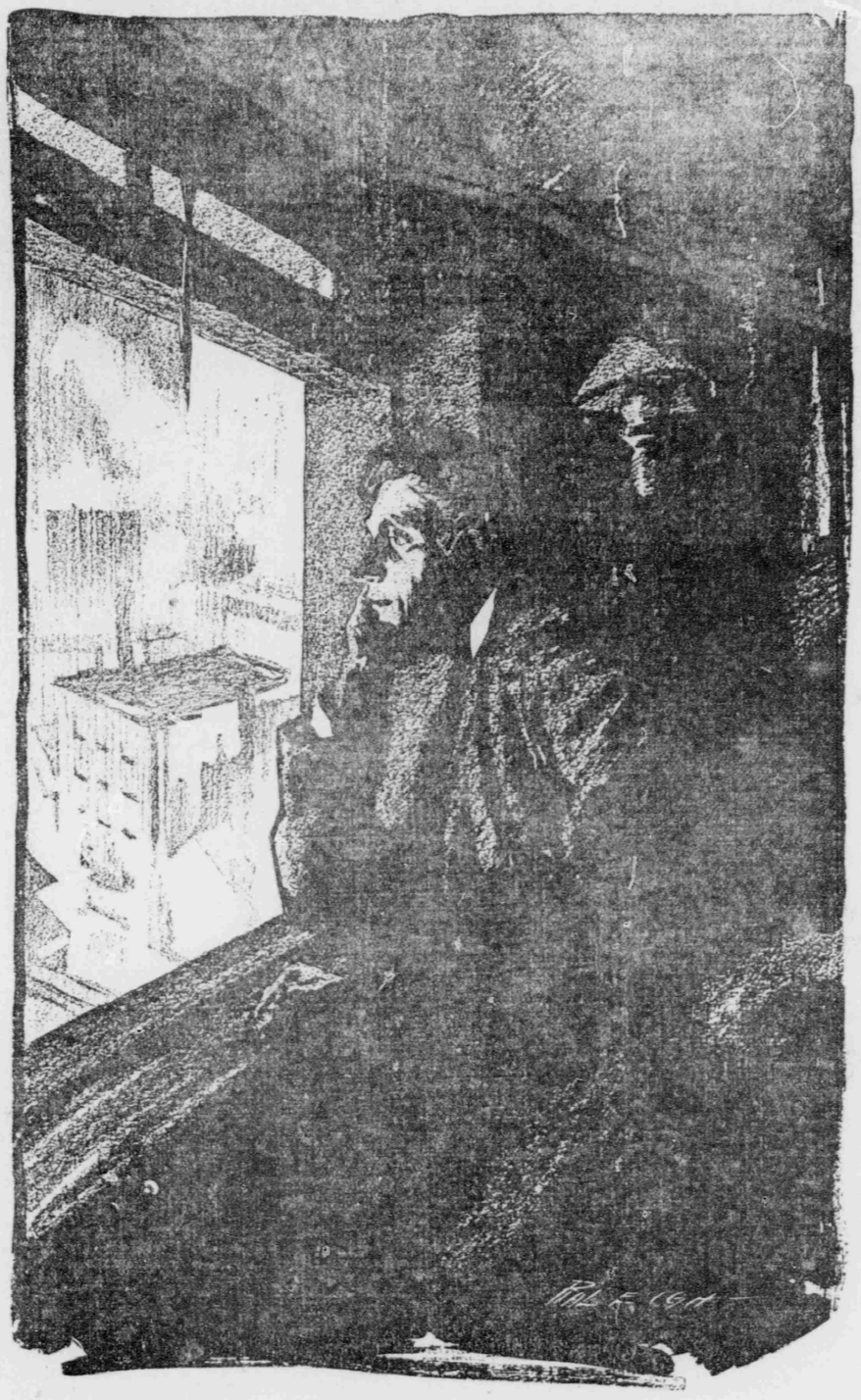
William was for business; Jack was for art. Both were young and ambitious; so they countered and clinched. I think they were from Nebraska or possibly Missouri, or Minnesota. Anyhow, they were out for success and scraps and scads, and they tackled the city like two Lochinvars with brass knucks and a pull at the City Hall.

Four years afterward William and Jack met at luncheon. The business man blew in like a March wind, hurled his silk hat at a waiter, dropped into the chair that was pushed under him, seized the bill of fare, and had ordered as far as cheese before the artist had time to do more than nod. After the nod a humorous smile came into his eyes.

"Billy," he said, "you're done for. The city has gobbled you up. It has taken you and cut you to its pattern, and stamped you with its brand. You are so nearly like ten thousand men I have seen today that you couldn't be picked out from them if it weren't for your laundry marks."

"Camembert," finished William. "What's that? Oh, you've still got your hammer out for New York, have you? Well, little old Noisyville-on-the-Subway is good enough for me. It's giving me mine. And, say, I used to think the West was the whole round world—only slightly flattened at the poles whenever Bryan ran. I used to yell myself hoarse about the free expanse, and hang my hat on the horizon, and say cutting things in the grocery to little soap drummers from the East. But I'd never seen New York then, Jack. Me for it from the rathskellers up. Sixth avenue is the West to me now. Have you heard this fellow Crusoe sing? The desert isle for him, I say; but my wife made me go. Give me May Irwin or E. S. Willard any time."

"Poor Billy," said the artist, delicately fingering a cigarette. "You remember when we were on our way to the East how we talked about this great, wonderful city, and how we meant to conquer it and never let it get the best of us? We were going to be just the same fellows we had always been, and never let it master us. It has downed you, old man. You have changed from a maverick into a butterick."



Far Below and Around Lay the City Like a Ragged, Purple Dream. The Irregular Houses Were Like the Broken Exteriors of Cliffs Lining Deep Gulches and Winding Streams.

"Don't see exactly what you are driving at," said William. "I don't wear an alpaca coat with blue trousers and a seersucker vest on dress occasions, like I used to do at home. You talk about being cut to a pattern—well, ain't the pattern all right? When you're in Rome you've got to do as the Dagoes do. This town seems to me to have other alleged metropolises skinned to flag stations. According to the railroad schedule I've got in my mind, Chicago and Saint Jo and Paris, France are asterisk stops—which means you wave a red flag and get on every other Tuesday. I like this little suburb of Tarrytown-on-the-Hudson. There's something or somebody doing all the time. I'm clearing $8,000 a year selling automatic pumps, and I'm living like kings-up. Why, yesterday I was introduced to John W. Gates, I took an auto ride with a wine agent's sister, I saw two men run over by a street car, and I seen Edna May play in the evening. Talk about the West, why, the other night I woke everybody up in the hotel hollering. I dreamed I was walking on a board sidewalk in Oshkosh. What have you got against this town, Jack? There's only one thing in it that I don't care for, and that's the ferryboat."

The artist gazed dreamily at the cartridge paper on the wall.

"This town," said he, "is a leech. It drains the blood of the country. Whoever comes to it accepts a challenge to a duel. Abandoning the figure of the leech, it is a juggernaut, a Moloch, a monster to which the innocence, the genius, and the beauty of the land must pay tribute. Hand to hand every newcomer must struggle with the leviathan. You've lost, Billy. It shall never conquer me. I hate it as one hates sin or pestilence or—the color work in a ten-cent magazine. I despise its very vastness and power. It has the poorest millionaires, the littlest great men, the haughtiest beggars, the plainest beauties, the lowest skyscrapers, the dolefulest pleasures of any town I ever saw. It has caught you, old man, but I will never run beside its chariot wheels. It glosses itself as the Chinaman glosses his collars. Give me the domestic finish. I could stand a town ruled by wealth or one ruled by an aristocracy; but this one is controlled by its lowest ingredients. Claiming culture, it is the crudest; asseverating its preeminence, it is the basest; denying all outside values and virtue, it is the narrowest. Give me the pure air and the open heart of the West country. I would go back there tomorrow if I could."

"Don't you like this filet mignon?" said William. "Shucks, now, what's the use to knock the town! It's the greatest ever. I couldn't sell one automatic pump between Harrisburg and, Tommy O'Keefe's saloon, in Sacramento, where I sell twenty here. And have you seen Sara Bernard in 'Andrew Mack' yet?"

"The town's got you, Billy," said Jack.

"All right," said William. "I'm going to buy a cottage on Lake Ronkonkona next summer."

At midnight Jack raised his window and sat close to it. He caught his breath at what he saw, though he had seen and felt it a hundred times.

Far below and around lay the city like a ragged, purple dream. The irregular houses were like the broken exteriors of cliffs lining deep gulches and winding streams. Some were mountainous; some lay in long, monotonous rows like the basalt precipices hanging over desert canyons. Such was the background of the wonderful, cruel, enchanting, bewildering, fatal, great city. But into this background were cut myriads of brilliant parallelograms and circles and squares through which glowed many-colored lights. And out of the violet and purple depths ascended like the city's soul sounds and odors and thrills that make up the civic body. There arose the breath of gayety unrestrained, of love, of hate, of all the passions that man can know. There below him lay all things, good or bad, that can be brought from the four corners of the earth to instruct, please, thrill, enrich, despoil, elevate, cast down, nurture or kill. Thus the flavor of it came up to him and went into his blood.

There was a knock on his door. A telegram had come for him. It came from the West, and these were its words:

"Come back home and the answer will be yes."

"DOLLY."

He kept the boy waiting ten minutes, and then wrote the reply: "Impossible to leave here at present." Then he sat at the window again and let the city put its cup of mandragora to his lips again.

After all it isn't a story; but I wanted to know which one of the heroes won the battle against the city. So I went to a very learned friend and laid the case before him. What he said was: "Please don't bother me; I have Christmas presents to buy."

So there it rests; and you will have to decide for yourself.

Mme. De Thebes Direful Prophecies Come True Only By Rare Exceptions.

Making Much of Certain Lucky Guesses in the Past, the Parisian Still Foretells the Woes to Come, While French Notables Still Consult This Aforetime Diviner to Their Aforetime Emperor

MADAME DE THEBES.

"LET us not too joyfully welcome 1906. Mme de Thebes says it is to be a strange, mad, incomprehensible year."

"She is right. Was it not she who foretold that fearful fire at the time of the charity bazaar."

"Yes, and the assassination of the unhappy Carnot."

"And remember she was the diviner accredited at the court of the second Empire."

So do the boulevards bolster up their faith in one of the strangest characters in Paris—a city of strange characters. Madame de Thebes lives today as a link with that yesterday when the third Napoleon ruled a brilliant court; when Eugenie was yet in the prime and power of beauty and happiness. De Thebes was a name to conjure in the sixties, but Mother Shipton's are scarcely taken so seriously nowadays, and the venerable palmist-seeress is heard of seldom, save as she marks each recurring January with another prediction—always gloomy, and seldom right in the retrospect.

Dumas and Zola used often to consult her, say the gossips, adding that Bernhardt and Calve place confidence in her prognostications; that Rostand has been known to ask her advice upon his plans for the future, as do, too, the monarch of at least two of the continental powers—Germany and Spain. Then is repeated the latest advance bulletin of woes to come, and French superstition takes another lease of life.

The Outlook for a Twelve-Month.

The news dispatches from the capital of a world's fads and fashions have of late been telling what 1906 is to bring forth—according to this Mme. de Thebes. Europe is to be disorganized—Germany is to meet the gravest of her crises, with death busy among her royal family—Austria is to develop "an outbreak with an unlooked-for sequel"—South America is to be in all sorts of trouble (the safest of guesses!)—England is to be involved in bank failures and financial panics—In the United States there is to come an "unconquerable epidemic."

It is all very ill-sounding. Small wonder that the timorous and credulous hesitate to enter upon undertakings of importance. But how have the past prophecies of this Madame de Thebes fallen with the year's happenings as seen through a "Hindsight?" Two things invariably have been true of her pronunciamentos: They have been unfalteringly threatening, and they have been most vague and mystical. From this last it follows that they have occasionally hit close to the mark—clever gossip could readily translate some very general expression into a definite prediction of that which had later come to pass; but De Thebes' record shows these "lucky" guesses to be the exceptions which rather prove the rule of the aged diviner's unreliability.

Her Mistakes in 1905.

A year ago the "hard-luck bulletin" got two items right—two out of twelve. Two other predictions came within fifty per cent of the later fact, while seven statements were as wrong as wrong could be. The twelfth sentence in the '05 prophecy could not have helped but come true; it read "and the women of the world are to come more and more into its fields of activity and prominence." What had been true of every year the venerable seeress has herself lived, and was of course true once more, even as it will be this year and next and all the rest of time's man-made cycles.

"The year is to see distress in England," wrote the Madame last Jnauary. Well, that government faces today its distressing 'unemployed' problem, to put down a credit mark for the Parisienne."

Again she said: "I see sad, sad news from Russia, in spite of the ending of her war." This, too, has come to pass—but the odds were at least even as to the war's end, and the adjective "sad" has applied to Russian news so long as to discount any claim of preturnatural foresight in using it.

The prognostications which may be said to have been partly correct advised a trembling world (1) of financial disturbances in Paris, and (2) of revolutions in Belgium and Austria. The little kingdom of Leopold has seldom passed a more prosperous, more peaceful twelve-month, but Austria has had more than her share of political ferment—albeit not a revolution. One may still, however, give the prophetess the benefit of the doubt and overlook the mere word. As to financial trouble in the French capital; was there not a panic in sugar stocks, with three or four resulting suicides? Of course. Right again—partly!

"Between April and June" Sarah Bernhardt was scheduled to die; at least that is the only construction which her followers put to the Thebes' gloomy outlook for "that celebrated actress-daughter of France, whose voice of gold has charmed nation after nation." This certainly was not "the Divine Sara," as we now see it, nor did any other even slightly prominent French "actress-daughter" make her final exit from the stage. Mme. de Thebes was not quite right on that count.

Death, indeed, was not obedient to her forebodings. "I see the most important personages of the nation," she wrote of England, "plunging that land into a deep grief. I see flags at half mast, and the cities draped in black." This is characteristically vague, but it could have meant nothing but the death of King Edward—and at last reports he was still in excellent health and spirits. As if one monarch's passing was to be not enough, January saw the foretelling of the sudden end of Wilhelm II and Franz Josef. Comment on these expressions of the "is-to-come" is unnecessary.

If these guesses fell wide of the mark of actuality, so, too, did these: "A great happiness for France I prophesy. It concerns Alsace and Lorraine," and "Affairs in the Eternal City are to occupy the entire attention of that world which likes to call itself civilized," and a most vivid account of an earthquake, the scene of it unquestionably laid in New York city. France seems as far off as ever from recovering the provinces taken from her in 1871; Rome has seldom been less in the public eye; and the nearest any earthquake got to New York was a diminutive tremor which knocked some colonial crockery off the shelves of the Maine housekeepers last July.

Some Facts Overlooked.

The de Thebes following might claim her accuracy in this last item, in that the world really was visited by two great earthquakes during the year just passed—but Italy is pretty nearly a hemisphere away from the American metropolis, and British India is quite that distance, and, besides, if a prophecy is to be of any material assistance, one ought to know within a few hundred miles just where it is to occur.

How will the seeress' admirers explain the failure of their priestess to foresee the dissolution of the late dual kingdom of Sweden and Norway? And if she so clearly realized the ending of the long struggle in the Far East, why did she not let the bankers know that Japan was to come out victor? And did her mind have no forewarning of the remarkable revolution against "graft" which was to sweep this country from ocean to ocean? Or of the world-part which President Roosevelt was to play in July and August? Or of the deaths of such world-figures as John Hay and Sir Henry Irving and Baron Alfonse de Rothschild?

"A strange, mad, incomprehensible year, this 1906 is to be," says the Boulevardier. "Mme. de Thebes predicts it."

Grant the prediction by all means. One may doubt its fulfillment.

WARWICK JAMES PRICE.

INTERESTING STATISTICS

There are now in this country 4,207 institutions for the shelter and relief of the poor, the sick, the aged, the homeless and the afflicted. This number includes orphanges, hospitals, schools and homes for the deaf, dumb, and blind, and asylums for the poor and friendless. The number of inmates on December 31 last was 284,302, and the number admitted and cared for from time to time during the year 1905 was 2,040,372. During the year 1903 $55,577,633 was expended in the support of these institutions. The money came from public taxation, private endowment, donations, subscriptions, and other forms of gifts; and $14,848,508 from fees paid by the inmates themselves.—Detroit News.